

Labor

The protection of workers' rights is crucial, not only to workers and their families, but to the country as a whole. It's vital that employees know that their retirement benefits and pensions are secure and their rights to earn a livable wage, work in a safe environment and organize are protected.

In this section:

- Minimum Wage
- Pensions
- Trade Adjustment Assistance
- Unions

Additional resources:

- Department of Labor
- California's Department of Industrial Relations
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration

Minimum Wage

Rep. Eshoo believes we need to raise the federal minimum wage. With the escalating costs of housing, transportation and education, working families need real assistance. Raising the minimum wage would help deliver that assistance.

While the California minimum wage is \$6.75, the national minimum wage is currently \$5.15, and it hasn't been adjusted since 1997. Since then, the real value of the minimum wage has dropped 20 percent. To correct this problem and update the minimum wage to reflect the inflation this country has faced since the last increase, Rep. Eshoo is a cosponsor of H.R. 2429, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2005. H.R. 2429 raises the national minimum wage to \$7.25, providing real assistance to working. H.R. 2429 has been referred to the House Committee on Education and Workforce.

Pensions

Pension security has become an increasingly important with the growing frequency of large companies shedding their pension liabilities through bankruptcy. This is wrong. The federal government, through the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC), assumes financial responsibility for defunct pension plans. As a result of the growing number of bankruptcies, the PBGC posted a deficit of \$23.1 billion as of the latest reporting date of September 30, 2005.

The House attempted to address this issue with H.R. 2830, the Pension Protection Act of 2005. Unfortunately, this bill only makes the problem worse, adding \$9 billion in liabilities to the PBGC and failing to prevent other corporations from shedding their pension liabilities. For these reasons Rep. Eshoo voted against this measure which passed the House by a vote of 294-132 on December 15, 2005.

Instead Rep. Eshoo supported the alternative proposal offered by Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Charles Rangel (D-NY) that would have made it harder for corporations to shed their pension liability, thereby protecting workers from losing their retirement benefits. Unfortunately this proposal was defeated.

Rep. Eshoo believes we need a pause from allowing companies to use the bankruptcy process to escape their obligations to pay retirement benefits. To that end Rep. Eshoo has cosponsored H.R. 2327, which puts a six-month moratorium on pension plan transfers to the PBGC. Putting a moratorium on these pension transfers will give Congress time to consider real reform of the current private pension system, protect workers from having their pension benefits slashed, and encourage unions and companies in financial distress to work together to come to a viable solution.

Additional Resources:

- Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)

The increasingly global economy has led to painful job losses through the migration of industries and the outsourcing of labor. As we embrace the challenges and advances of the global economy, we also have to provide assistance to workers who are negatively impacted. Rep. Eshoo believes we need to help workers who are affected by trade agreements to cope with the layoffs that can result and provide them with

training, when appropriate, to find new jobs.

To expand the assistance we currently provide to workers, Rep. Eshoo has cosponsored H.R. 4156, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Improvement Act.

This legislation extends TAA benefits to service sector employees including IT workers, engineers, and customer services employees. Furthermore, H.R. 4156 would:

- Triple the current training funding cap from \$220 million to \$660 million by 2012, in order to ensure that benefits are accessible to all eligible workers.
- Increase the healthcare premium subsidy from 65% to 80%.
- Simplify the application process by authorizing the Secretary of Labor to certify certain groups of workers as eligible for TAA on an industry-wide basis, rather than on a plant-by-plant basis as required by current law.
- Improve outreach efforts by establishing a telephone hotline that workers and employers can call with questions about TAA eligibility and application procedures.
- Require the Department of Labor to collect and publish every 6 months detailed data about participation in the TAA program.

Workers' Rights

The evolution of labor standards has been a long and often painful process. In order to ensure the fair treatment of workers, Rep. Eshoo believes workers have the right to organize. She is a cosponsor of H.R. 1696, the Employee Free Choice Act. H.R. 1696 amends the National Labor Relations Act to create an efficient system to enable employees to join or create labor organizations, and to implement mandatory legal injunctions against companies that infringe on a worker's right to organize a union. The bill provides a simple, fair, direct method for workers to form unions by signing cards or petitions, and provides for three times the amount of actual back-pay when a worker is fired during an organizing campaign or first-contract negotiations.